



Curriculum Links

Music, History

Contents

Cast and Creatives

About the Show

Production and Techniques

Further Resources

Provocations and Activities

[Download SchoolFest 101 here.](#)

Your guide to make the most of the festival experience.

Rhiannon Giddens

With Francesco Turrisi

2020 TEACHERS RESOURCE

**New Zealand
Festival** OF THE ARTS

Wellington
Community Trust
supporting community initiatives

CAST AND CREATIVES

Rhiannon Giddens (United States)
rhiannongiddens.com

Francesco Turrisi (Italy)

Jason Sypher Bass (United States)



Francesco Turrisi and Rhiannon Giddens. Photo: Karen Cox

ABOUT THE SHOW

With her soul-stirring voice and a mastery of the banjo and fiddle, Rhiannon Giddens has bridged musical genres and time, bringing a warmth and show-stopping intensity to the music of Americana past and future.

Since stepping out from her Grammy Award-winning band Carolina Chocolate Drops, she's captivated global audiences with protest songs, opera arias, film soundtracks and covers of greats from Dolly Parton to Nina Simone. Giddens can take a tune from deep in the dark heart of America's country-blues tradition and shine a light on it in such a way as to make it feel brand new. Her original songs haunt you like familiar country ballads from a century ago.

This special event features songs from her latest album *there is no Other*, a collaboration with Italian multi-instrumentalist and jazz musician Francesco Turrisi that is a stunning hybrid style of gospel, opera, bluegrass, early baroque and Mediterranean music. Experience the spine-tingling sound of new Americana that takes us back to music's earliest heartbeats.

'From the beginning of our musical partnership, Francesco and I have been struck with the commonality of the human experience through music; how instruments, modes, and the very functions of songs and tunes are universal from culture to culture,' Rhiannon Giddens

Rhiannon Giddens's music centres around reclaiming African American contributions to folk and country music and bringing to light new connections between music from the past and the present. *there is no Other* is a collaboration between Giddens and Francesco Turissi bought together by their shared interest in musical origins and history.

At the heart of *there is no other* is the idea around breaking down 'othering,' discrimination and prejudice on the basis of group identity.

PRODUCTION AND TECHNIQUES

SOUND

“The banjo is my chosen instrument – it’s what I write my music on, I play a replica of a banjo from the 1950s. It was the first commercial-style banjo in the United States so it’s the first one that white people played. Before that there would have been many years of black folks playing home-made plantation instruments: they would have been using gourds as banjos, and then it changed to the hoop and the skin stretched over that, and from then on that’s what all banjos looked like...[it’s] seen as a totally white instrument even though that transition was a lot more grey. There were a lot of black people who played the banjo for a long time into the late ’50s.” Rhiannon Giddens to [The Irish Times](#)

Classically trained (as an opera singer) Giddens has an extraordinary range. She mainly plays string instruments—the fiddle and the banjo and is inspired by the history of black string bands. Turrisi, among other things is an expert on drums from all over the world, focusing mostly on frame drums which almost all cultures have. Ireland has the bodhran, Italy the Tamborello, North Africa the bendir and Brazil, the pandeiro. There are hundreds, and Turrisi is expert at half of them.

INFLUENCES

Although Giddens is generally regarded as a folk musician, her influences come from far and wide including soul, blues, gospel, jazz, zydeco, opera. Turrisi has an interest in medieval music, classical baroque and jazz, and is the ultimate improviser. He is a multi-instrumentalist, an exceptional percussionist and pianist. These influences combine in *there is no Other* – “We’ll play an Appalachian ballad with an Iranian frame drum normally used by Sufis for trance,” Turrisi says to The Irish Times “but you know, there’s almost a trance element to the ballad singing and the resonance of the large frame drum gives a kind of a drone effect...They seem to go hand in hand: we’ve discovered improbable connections that somehow work.”

HISTORY

“I’m always surprised how little musicians know about the music they play. I find my biggest inspiration in what came before” Rhiannon Giddens to [Versify Podcast](#)

Giddens is a musician but also a researcher, who delves deep into her research topics, using her skills as a musician to bring to light new connections between music from the past and the present.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social justice permeates all of Giddens work. She has become known for her brave and articulate words. Her group the Carolina Chocolate Drops, in which she plays banjo and fiddle won a Grammy for their revival of black string-band music. The album *Songs of our Native Daughters* reimagines traditional folksongs putting the experiences of African American women into a historical and musical context. *there is no Other* uses the shared history of sounds and rhythms from Africa, the Arabic world, Europe and America to make a comment about borders, human movement and the action of ‘othering’ or discriminating against someone.

FURTHER RESOURCES AND READINGS

WATCH

Rhiannon Giddens and Francesco Turrisi in conversation with WNYC's All Of It: youtu.be/EcatZHAVNSE

Explore a wealth of live videos, commentary and full albums at Rhiannon Giddens's YouTube channel: youtube.com/channel/UCTQvn1-6lhiMo994ivalgmA

READ

Read about *Songs of Our Native Daughters* and its relationship to the #metoo movement: theguardian.com/music/2019/feb/24/rhiannon-giddens-songs-of-our-native-daughters-interview

"The roots musician is inspired by the evolving legacy of the black string band." A long but brilliant read from *The New Yorker*: newyorker.com/magazine/2019/05/20/rhiannon-giddens-and-what-folk-music-means

Read about Rhiannon Giddens from a historic perspective in her conversation with The Smithsonian: smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/rhiannon-giddens-american-music-history-21st-century-sound

LISTEN

To *there is no Other*: open.spotify.com/album/1NC1Jxgjl6JFc3YR9JstXb

Giddens and Turrisi in studio session with NPR's World Café: npr.org/sections/world-cafe/2019/06/14/732680977/worlds-colliding-rhiannon-giddens-and-francesco-turrisi

"I'm always surprised how little musicians know about the music they play. I find my biggest inspiration in what came before" listen to Rhiannon Giddens on the Versify podcast here: wpln.org/post/versify-37-our-babies-have-always-been-the-war/

GO FURTHER

Learn about opera's most famous arias with Rhiannon Giddens on her podcast Aria Code: wnycstudios.org/podcasts/aria-code

Learn about the history of the banjo with banjo maker Jim Hartel: youtu.be/VbCjb6g-bT4

Research the history of taonga puoro (traditional Māori musical instruments) and discover the history of music in Aotearoa: teara.govt.nz/en/maori-musical-instruments-taonga-puoro and tepapa.govt.nz/discover-collections/read-watch-play/maori/maori-musical-instruments

Explore an archive of the folk songs of Aotearoa, from 70's tramping songs to waiata: folksong.org.nz

"She can write brand-new originals ... that sound decades, if not centuries, old." ROLLING STONE on *there is no Other*

PROVOCATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Before the Festival

Based upon the information that your class has access to (personal knowledge, YouTube and other media, advertising from the Festival, etc.) what are you expecting in the show?

Discuss folk music – what is it? Where might you hear it? Do you know of any folk musicians? Explore some folk music from different cultures.

At the Festival

What captures my attention during the performance?

What feelings and emotions do I have while I am watching the performance?

What questions do I have about this performance? What is the meaning of the lyrics and music?

Were any of your preconceptions about the performance changed? Challenged? Why? How?

At the Festival

What were some of the thoughts you had while you were at the performance.?

Did you enjoy the style of music? How did it make you feel?

Did the performers express a range of emotions through their music making? How?

How successful were the musicians at keeping the audience engaged throughout the performance?

Did Rhiannon Giddens have good stage presence? What is stage presence and how do you achieve it?

What genres of music did you recognise in the performance? How were they interpreted?

Listen to clips from some of Giddens's and Turrisi's influences including black string bands, Sufi trance, Blues, Appalachian mountain ballads, medieval music and more...What similarities can you find in Rhiannon Giddens's music?

Did you learn anything at the performance? What was it?

Did you see any instruments you haven't seen before? Which ones?

Many of Rhiannon Giddens's songs are reworked traditional ballads. Choose one of the songs in *there is no Other* and research it. What is the story? Is it an old song or a new one? What are the musical influences? What instruments have been used? What is their history?

Is there a song or type of music that is part of your history? Research it's history and where this style of music came from. What instruments are generally used? Where and how is it performed?

Need something more? Contact your SchoolFest team with any questions about the performance.

schoolfest@festival.co.nz | (04) 473 0149